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SUBJECT: PRT NAJAF: NEW GOVERNOR,S THOUGHTS ON RECENT ATTACK

Classified By: Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader Fred Fonteneau for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a Provincial Reconstruction Team Najaf cable.

11. (S) SUMMARY. The day following an Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP) attack which targeted a U.S. convoy in Najaf, Governor Adnan al Zurfi visited the FOB to discuss the incident. He expressed concern and pointed fingers at the Iraqi Police (IP) and the Iranians. He stated unequivocally that the IP were involved and promised to open an investigation as well as make changes in the local police hierarchy in Najaf. He also blamed the Iranians, saying that the attack was not motivated by Najafi entities or political parties, but was purely masterminded by the Iranians. His charges against Iran in general need to be analyzed in light of al Zurfi,s longstanding feud with ISCI/Badr and Tehran. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) On May 16, a U.S. military movement team from 1-2 Infantry Battalion of 172nd Brigade Combat Team was returning from training at the Najaf Police Academy when one humvee was hit by an EFP. There was one military KIA and one wounded. The attack occurred approximately three quarters of a mile from FOB Endeavor and just 50 yards from an IP checkpoint. The police had apparently cleared the area of pedestrians and hid behind barriers just before the attack. They did not assist and refused to search the area of the residences in close proximity, citing lack of search warrants. The military movement team reported that it was obvious, that the police were involved.

13. (S) On the following day, Governor Adnan al Zurfi visited the FOB to discuss the incident. (Note: The PRT had called the Chairman of the Provincial Council to request a meeting with him, but he arranged for al Zurfi to meet with us instead. End note.) Al Zurfi said that there is no doubt that the IP knew of the attack and were complicit. (Note: He was elected governor on May 1 and had not been sworn in as of the May 17 meeting. A Presidential Decree confirming al Zurfi as Governor was released on May 19. A rumor that al Zurfi would immediately change the Chief of Police has been circulating for months. End note.) He assured the PRT and FOB leadership that he would do more than merely change the Chief: he promised sweeping changes across the Najafi police force.

14. (S) He went on to rail against the Iranians, saying that Iranians were no doubt behind the attack and that the Iranian agenda to attack coalition forces has strengthened in Najaf in recent days. He did not link the police to the Iranians specifically, but that implication was clear. He claims that Iran is gathering both Sunni and Shia radical groups, bringing them to Iran, and training and funding them. He says that once he has more information about this attack, he will have a future picture of Iranian operations. He stated that often non-Iranian groups take the blame to confuse the issue. He plans to create an intelligence fusion cell to gather information on Iranian activities in Najaf. Members from different agencies will first concentrate on Najaf

International Airport and then expand operations.

¶5. (S) Al Zurfi assured the PRT that the problem is not with the Sadrists. He stated that the Sadrists have no problem with coalition forces; they want peace and are 100 percent against Iran; Iran ruined their life. Al Zurfi said that one goal of his is to repair the relationship with the Sadrists, who blame him for killing thousands of Sadrists in ¶2004. He says that he is making headway and will continue to Q2004. He says that he is making headway and will continue to work with Sadrists, especially since they now make up part of the governing coalition on the Provincial Council.

¶6. (S) He again insisted that the Iranians were behind the attack and foresaw future attacks. He said that Iranians consider Najaf and Karbala to be &their8 cities and will continue to exert their influence. They have many projects in Najaf that, had al Zurfi been Governor, he would not have approved because &the Iranians don,t give free money.8 He reiterated that he would like to lessen the Iranian influence in Najaf. The Iranians know that he is working against them and will become more frustrated and angry.

¶7. (S) COMMENT: Al Zurfi,s theories need to be considered in light of the current political situation, however, as well as his long-standing feud with ISCI/Badr. Governor Asaad Abu Gelal (ISCI) has filed a legal complaint against the election of al Zurfi and has thus far refused to transfer power. Abu Gelal,s reluctance to step down quietly mirrors the situation in the 2005 provincial elections, when al Zurfi - the CPA-appointed Governor - lost out to Abu Gelal but refused to step down, citing voting irregularities. With a vacuum in the provincial leadership, the recent uptick in

BAGHDAD 00001335 002.2 OF 002

violence can be attributed to local politics rather than a foreign influence. Especially with rumors of al Zurfi,s plans to shake up the IP leadership, the indications of IP involvement do not necessarily point to an Iranian hidden hand.
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